

# **‘Soft’ versus ‘hard’ change: Ideological traditionalism and organisational innovation in Greek Orthodox ecclesiastical governance**

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**Forthcoming (2019): [Journal of Contemporary Religion](#)**

## **Abstract**

Studies of church governance approach religious change either as ‘soft’ transformation (ideological and discursive adjustments implemented by clerical elites) or as ‘hard’ restructuring (shifts in decision-making processes and administrative forms). This article illustrates that the joint, rather than separate, consideration of the two types of change provides a more nuanced description of the internal dynamics of religious organisations. Employing a framework with comparative applicability, which breaks with standard theoretical approaches, the empirical application examines a case in which the two types of change coincided: the Orthodox Church of Greece in the late twentieth century, where a radically conservative ideological transformation accompanied a particular instance of bureaucratic modernisation (lay involvement in high-level ecclesiastical governance).

**Keywords:** Church politics, religious change, Greek Orthodoxy, lay involvement, organisational reform

## Introduction

Organisations that measure their history in centuries and remain important actors in fluid institutional environments must be particularly adept at responding to ‘pressures of scale, complexity, markets, resource flows [and] environmental uncertainty’ (Hinings and Raynard 2014, 166). This observation applies even to organisations that draw a large part of their legitimacy by appearing to be traditionalist and unreformable (Kelley 1972; Iannaccone 1994). The observation applies especially to organised religions as entities that should have been on the wane, supposedly, in a modernising world (Berger 1967; Luckmann 1967; Wilson 1976; Bruce 2002; Dobbelaere 2002). Durability and continued societal relevance make instances of ‘change’ within these entities an object of study that can produce valuable insights into their survival strategies.

At the descriptive level, this article documents an organisational innovation that the Orthodox Church of Greece, the established religion in Greece, introduced in the second half of the twentieth century. The innovation refers to joint clergy-lay committees that promoted outsider (lay) representation in the central governance structure of the church. The committees were rolled out in two waves – the late 1960s and late 1990s respectively – that coincided with the emergence of radically conservative ideological currents among the clerical hierarchy. Studies of the church’s enduring role in Greek society and politics have ignored this particular instance of ‘hard’ administrative change (mixed-member committees) in the central governance structure of the organisation. Instead, they have focused overwhelmingly on ‘soft’ change, particularly on variations in the intensity of the church’s conservative discourse (Alivizatos 1999; Mavrogordatos 2003; Stavrakakis 2003; Karagiannis 2009; Oulis et al. 2010; Fokas 2013; Patrikios 2013; Papastathis 2015). These

studies have reinforced a popular stereotype of the organisation as one ‘noted for its conservatism and its tendency to religious nationalism’ (Kalaitzidis 2009, 158).

Against this imbalance in existing works towards studying ‘soft’ change, the first aim of the present analysis is to ask why and in what way the Orthodox Church of Greece implements ‘hard’, structural innovations; in this case, through greater openness to lay organisational involvement. This is a counterintuitive point. Unlike other, Western religious traditions, this particular organisation’s central ecclesiastical structure is considered historically averse to lay involvement (e.g. Zizioulas 2009, 25; see also Papageorgiou 2000). Taking advantage of the narrow focus of the investigation, which deals with a specific type of internal organisational change, in this exercise I attempt to capture the lay involvement phenomenon in great depth and with contextual nuance. I will propose theoretical explanations of its presence, which extend beyond the standard treatments of religious change as a sign of internal secularisation. My ultimate objective is to draw greater scholarly attention to the phenomenon’s causes, evolution and consequences.

A second, wider aim is to contribute to the empirical study of organised religion by illustrating the usefulness of comparing apparently incompatible ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ changes implemented by the same religious actor (see an analogous distinction regarding the Greek Orthodox context in Anastassiadis 2010; see also Karagiannis 2009; Roudometof and Makrides 2010; Willert and Molokotos-Liederman 2012; for a comparative perspective, see Martin 1978, 131). The distinction between the two types of change separates the normative or ideational dimension of an organisational form from its technical performance dimension, by arguing that change does not necessarily happen in the same

manner along the two dimensions (see also Zucker 1977; Meyer and Scott 1983). The Orthodox Church of Greece is an ideal setting for the joint investigation of rhetorical-discursive-ideological versus technical-structural-administrative change for the following reasons. First, the church has experienced the two types of change, ‘soft’ and ‘hard’, under the same religious leader. Second, this concurrence has happened more than once, introducing some welcome contextual variation. Third, the church has the characteristics that the opening paragraph identifies as worth exploring by students of organisation: i) longevity among public institutions in general; ii) longevity as a religious institution in a modernising society in particular; and iii) a public image of being unreformable and out-of-sync in times of flux.

The article begins with a summary of empirical studies of ‘hard’ change in ecclesiastical organisations, with a particular focus on lay involvement in religious governance. These studies are placed within a broader perspective that centres on the functions of outsider appointments in organisational survival and growth. Using the analytical distinction between discursive (soft) and structural (hard) features, the discussion then turns to an examination of the central administrative structure of the Church of Greece and the historical context in which the introduction of lay participation via mixed-membership committees took place. This allows a direct contrast of the ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ features of interest. The empirical picture is supplemented by primary data that describe the membership of these committees, leading to a qualified discussion of the functions fulfilled by lay involvement. The conclusion proposes directions for a comparative research agenda regarding the study of different permutations of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ change in religious organisations.

## **Understanding the ‘hard’ change of interest**

Structural or ‘hard’ change in organisations can assume a number of forms, ranging from the vertical sharpening of levels to the horizontal expansion of units. It can have different types of motivations and consequences ranging from efficiency gains (or losses), external legitimacy gains (or losses), the resolution (or escalation) of factional infighting to no consequence at all. As an entry point, it is first necessary to discuss the particular aspect of ‘hard’ change examined in this study. Such a discussion is also required to illustrate that previous research has overlooked this type of internal structural change for the religious actor in question.

The section starts by reviewing empirical studies of increasing lay involvement in religious organisations. These studies continue a long scholarly tradition, which traces the structural evolution of institutional faith (Troeltsch 1931; Weber et al. 1958; Harrison 1959; Beckford 1975; DiMaggio 1998; Tracey 2012). Common analytical distinctions made in this literature are those between ordained and unordained personnel; professional theologians and expert managers; clergy insiders and lay outsiders; or those employed in the core line of the organisation (saving souls) and those charged with its administration.

To cite a few notable examples, a study of top officials in twentieth-century Protestant denominations in the United States found that those responsible for the day-to-day running of operations came increasingly from management-career backgrounds, with a parallel decline in the presence of active clergy (Chaves 1993, 29). A survey of Christian congregations in the same setting, specifically in California, discovered increasing lay involvement in core organisational tasks traditionally associated with clergy status

(Monahan 1999). Dobbelaere (1979) examined the increase of lay personnel and the parallel decrease of clergy in the delivery of education by the Roman Catholic Church in Belgium between the 1950s and 1970s. An investigation into the composition of teaching staff in Australian Catholic schools traced a similar decline of ordained personnel between the 1960s and 1990s (Canavan 1999).

This empirical scholarship interprets instances of rising lay involvement as evidence that churches are becoming more ‘worldly’ by assuming features typical of businesses and governments in response to the pressures of advancing modernity (see the concept of internal secularisation in Luckmann 1967, 36–37). There is an undeniable tension that this interpretation captures at the organisational level; the recruitment of outside members that have been socialised and trained to operate under different professional and ethical codes of conduct may clash with the church’s internal principles.

The present analysis adopts a more generalist perspective in approaching the phenomenon of lay involvement (see also McGuire 2002, 10–11). It focuses on the ability of durable organisations – in this case, an institutional religion – to adapt to their environment by implementing internal structural innovations. This viewpoint has less to do with treating contemporary deviations (lay involvement) from familiar historical forms of religious organisation (a professional priesthood) as ‘less religious’ and ‘increasingly secularised’. It has more to do with studying structural reform in the religious domain as a special case of the broader phenomenon of organisational resilience (Hinings and Raynard 2014, 166).

The discussion now turns to the various efficiency- and effectiveness-maximising functions of outsider involvement in organisational decision-making in general and

explores their application to religious organisations. These functions refer to processes of specialisation, representation and external oversight that affect the organisation's day-to-day technical operations. In this reading, organisational forms such as corporate firms and nonprofits use outsider appointments as a linkage to various external constituencies (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). External members invited to participate in organisational governance are 'desirable because of their breadth of knowledge, experience, and independence from the management' (Bathala and Rao 1995, 60). In the religious domain various churches have opened up their decision-making structures to the laity at critical moments in their history, such as the Protestant Reformation, the stillborn Moscow Council of 1917–1918 and the Second Vatican Council.

Lay appointments can broaden a church's knowledge base by providing expertise in fields that are not the traditional domain of professional training within the organisation (Hillman et al. 2007, 943). This process is related to the tendency of bureaucracies to assume ever greater degrees of complexity and specialisation (Weber 1947). Bioethics, public relations and finance are not the standard remit of ministerial education, which is usually organisation specific; that is, theology oriented. External expertise is necessary if the organisation plans to engage constructively with emerging issues. External members can also improve deliberation by affording perspectives that contrast established views within the organisation (cross-fertilisation). They can serve as communication channels with external constituencies and provide a basis for coalition building between the organisation and these audiences.

Outsider appointments can also function as a mechanism for auditing internal procedures and providing 'voice' to external stakeholders (Jensen and Meckling 1976; Fama and

Jensen 1983). In the religious domain in particular faith leaders are in a uniquely advantageous position among organisational managers. They draw their authority from supernatural sources that have postulated monitoring abilities over the leader's conduct. However, the religious leader is still responsible for the proper handling of tangible organisational funds, especially donations provided by lay members. This is a typical control problem faced by large, complex organisations where those responsible for the allocation of collective resources are not necessarily the sole owners or stakeholders, but are appointed by the latter. The participation of lay representatives in ecclesiastical governance offers a solution to this principal-agent situation. External monitors from the lay donor community that are involved in church administration can guard against opportunistic behaviour by clerical elites. This external check on clerical decisions safeguards the welfare of lay contributors and is considered typical of Protestant ecclesiastical polities (Fama and Jensen 1983, 320).

From this organisational perspective, which extends beyond the strict confines of the secularisation debate, the Orthodox Church of Greece presents a context in which the theme of 'hard' internal reform within a durable religious institution remains overshadowed by studies of 'soft' change. Comparing the two types of change will determine the usefulness of the proposed approach in creating a rounded account of change in religious organisations.

### **Organisational context**

The Church of Greece is an established religion and the dominant religious actor in Greece. It is part of the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition and has been the subject of



renewed scholarly attention in recent decades. Several studies have engaged with the familiar theme of conservative reactions to societal change, as these reactions are reflected in the rhetoric and ideological orientation of the church (e.g. Alivizatos 1999; Mavrogordatos 2003; Stavrakakis 2003; Papastathis 2015). The object of these analyses has been change in the content and tone of religious narratives, doctrines, sermons, public circulars and symbols. As the type of change examined has been typically in the same direction, from ‘plain’ conservative to ‘radically’ conservative, these studies reinforce an understanding of the organisation as the proverbially ‘strict church’; resilient, absolutist and backward looking (cf. Kelley 1972). A constitutional law expert, for instance, called on the Greek Church in 2000 to accept that ‘we do not live in a closed monolithic society, that the cultural boundaries are abolished and that there are no longer impervious territories controlled by a single church’ (quoted in Karagiannis 2009, 133).

The Church of Greece is a public legal entity in an ethnically homogeneous state. It plays a central role in Greek politics, social welfare and culture (Martin 1978; Georgiadou 1995; Mavrogordatos 2003; Backstrom et al. 2010). At the population level, decades’ worth of survey data including the Eurobarometer series (Schmitt and Scholz 2005), the European Values Study (EVS 2015) and a recent Pew survey (Pew 2017) draw a picture of a nation that remains staunchly affiliated to the church (90 per cent or more of respondents), at least at the level of identification. Greece’s constitution recognises the church as the ‘prevailing’ religion in the country (Article 3.1), with privileges that include veto power over alterations to the text of the Holy Scriptures. The country’s constitution prohibits proselytising (Article 13.2), a ban that could be thought to benefit the historically dominant church. It should be noted here that, despite the sparse enforcement of this provision in recent decades, in principle new cases can always be prosecuted. A 1999 report draws the

following picture regarding the relationship between dominant church, society and state in Greece during a period that coincides with the introduction of clergy-lay committees:

Greeks tend to link religious affiliation very closely to ethnicity. Many attribute the preservation of Greek national identity to the actions of the Greek Orthodox Church during approximately 400 years of Ottoman rule and the subsequent nation building period. The Church wields significant social, political, and economic influence; it owns a considerable, although undetermined, amount of property. In the minds of many Greeks, an ethnic Greek is also Orthodox Christian. Non-Orthodox citizens have complained of being treated with suspicion or told that they were not truly Greek when they revealed their religious affiliation.

(US Department of State 1999)

In the strictly hierarchical, episcopal polity of the Church of Greece active clergy dominate the top decision-making posts. Government representatives were involved in the past in important roles, but the church has traditionally discouraged lay involvement from outside the Greek government in matters of central ecclesiastical administration (Papageorgiou 2000). Although lay members play a role at parish-level councils and in certain specialist services, the exclusive role of senior clergy in central church governance is doctrinally enshrined in Orthodox theology (for a formal discussion, see Zizioulas 2009, 37–38).

The Holy Synod of the Hierarchy is the supreme authority of the Church of Greece. It is presently composed of 82 senior serving bishops. These metropolitans serve for life, each

one corresponding to a diocese in the country. The Synod convenes usually once per year, operates a smaller administrative board that meets more regularly with a rotating membership of 12 senior bishops and is chaired by the Archbishop of Athens and all Greece, who is also the head of the church. The Synod decides on all general governance matters. These range from issues of doctrinal compliance, legislation, administration, interreligious affairs, financial issues and leadership succession. The Synod also serves as an appellate court. Inviting the laity to participate in the central bureaucratic structure of the organisation is an unusual move worth examining in this ecclesiastical setting.

The introduction of joint clergy-lay committees in two waves, in the late 1960s and late 1990s respectively, formalised the presence of lay members in high-level church governance. First-generation committees were introduced in 1969, during the early years of the military dictatorship (1967-1974). Most second-generation committees were introduced during 1998-1999. All these mixed-membership committees are permanent bodies. Each committee is responsible for a particular work domain. There is also provision for the creation of new committees on specialist topics as these may emerge. The operation and exact composition of the committees are regulated strictly by formal provisions approved by the Synod. The provisions are treated as legally binding once they have been published in the official Greek Government Gazette. The documents that contain these provisions are publicly available (see Table 1).

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Article 16 of the 1969 legal charter, which introduced first-generation committees, stipulates that committees are created to produce research and provide counsel to the Synod in a particular area, conduct external engagement activities, prepare materials for the Synod's meetings and implement Synodic decisions. The still valid 1977 charter (Article 10), which replaced the 1969 charter, contains the same provisions. Second-generation committees are defined and regulated in the same way. The official regulations often specify the exact professional background that lay members of certain committees should hold. For example, external members of the finance committee are expected to be economics professors or senior civil servants, including Central Bank staff (Article 24, 160/2004). Likewise, the committee of the academy of religious art, which coordinates the training of clergymen and artists in Christian Orthodox art, is expected to include painters, sculptors and architects. Similar provisions apply to other committees, such as those on bioethics, Christian monuments, the environment and women's issues.

Lay members are not selected independently. They are appointed by the clerical hierarchy. Final decisions on all matters on which the committees provide research and advice are in the hands of the Synod. Almost all committees have produced publicly accessible reports or announcements at some point since introduction, so these are not defunct bodies. For instance, the term 'synodal committee' appears 150 times in the Greek language website of a specialised religious news agency ([www.amen.gr](http://www.amen.gr)) for the period 2009-2017. Therefore, according to the rationale contained in the organisation's formal rules, lay members of these committees appear to perform specialist and advisory functions, although the available information does not indicate the extent to which committee outputs are taken into account by the clerical hierarchy. Committees do not seem to serve any independent

oversight role or any drive for organisational democratisation, as they remain under clerical control.

### **‘Hard’ change within the context of ‘soft’ change**

This section takes a closer look at the two periods that witnessed the introduction of mixed-membership committees, the late 1960s and late 1990s respectively. Connections will be drawn with a parallel but better studied transformation that the organisation underwent in the two periods. The parallel transformation involved the promotion by clerical elites of radical versions of the church’s standard blending of Greek Orthodoxy and Greek national identity. Mapping the similarities and differences in the two periods will also help us to make sense of how contradictory ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ changes can be introduced concurrently by the same religious actor.

The first appearance of these committees was in 1969, in a period when Greece was ruled by a right-wing military dictatorship. One of the core aims of the military regime was to promote the ethos of a ‘Christian Greek’ civilisation. In the first year of military rule (1967) the regime exercised direct influence over church affairs by promoting an ad hoc Synod composed of regime supporters among higher clergy. This intervention led to the replacement of several senior bishops – including the church’s leader – by hierarchs that were considered supportive of the military dictatorship and its vision (Martin 1978, 131; Mavrogordatos 2003). The new church leader, Archbishop Hieronymos (1967-1973), who was endorsed by the military, shared the regime’s conservative fusion between Greek nation and Orthodox religion in the service of anticommunist propaganda (Makrides 2010). The new leader introduced the new, mixed-member committee system in 1969.

A side note is necessary at this point. This historical narrative might create the impression that the conservative turn of the clerical leadership was a novel development, even an opportunistic positioning of the church in the face of a new political regime. This would be a misleading conclusion. The new Archbishop elected in 1967 was part of an existing circle of church members with strong links to an ascetic lay organisation called *Zoë* or 'Life' (Martin 1978, 247–248, 263). The organisation, which was originally a brotherhood of lay theologians, had close connections to the military regime (Yannaras 2000, 107). Its staunchly conservative and anticommunist ethos was driven by the perceived anti-Christian and anti-Greek nature of communist ideology (Makrides 2004). The novelty, therefore, of the church's ideological turn in the late 1960s lies in the rise of members of this conservative circle to top positions in the clerical hierarchy and not in the sudden transformation of the church into a conservative organisation.

Returning to the main point, a similar confluence of conservative ideological intensification and organisational innovation took place in the late 1990s. Second-generation committees were rolled out in the early stages of the tenure of Archbishop Christodoulos (1998-2008), who was elected to the throne with support from conservative clerical factions. Similarly to Archbishop Hieronymos in the late 1960s, Christodoulos led an explicit effort to highlight the church's nationalist character – its exclusivist 'Greekness' (Mavrogordatos 2003, 128–129; Karagiannis 2009; Oulis et al. 2010). The overall tenure of Christodoulos, who had previously served as chief secretary of the Holy Synod under Hieronymos during the period of military rule, expressed a reaction to globalisation and to Western liberal values as perceived threats to an indigenous Greek

Orthodox identity and promoted the church's role as sole protector of that identity (Stavrakakis 2003; Roudometof 2008).

By comparison, the intervening tenure of Archbishop Seraphim (1974-1998) as church leader – who succeeded Hieronymos during the final months of the military regime and was succeeded, in turn, by Christodoulos – marked a relatively moderate and politically neutral presence. On the whole, the church coexisted peacefully, rather unexpectedly, with a Greek state that was governed by a socialist government during a large part of Seraphim's tenure (Georgiadou 1995, 308; Makrides 2010). The successor of Christodoulos in 2008, the current Archbishop at the time of writing, who is also called Hieronymos, has been viewed as a similarly accommodationist presence in relative terms (Fokas 2013, 403).

Despite the similarities in the two periods in which mixed-member committees were introduced, various important developments took place between the late 1960s and the late 1990s that also distinguish these periods. As a stable electoral democracy following the collapse of the military regime in 1974, and a member country of the European Union since 1981, Greece became an increasingly affluent and educated society, also turning into a host to immigrant flows in a region of resurgent nationalisms in the 1990s. The 1990s climate intensified modernisation pressures, creating a different societal context compared to the late 1960s.

### **The nature of 'hard' change**

To document the exact content of the reform introduced in the church's central governance structure in the two periods I collected information on committee composition from the organisation's website (see Appendix). The key distinction captured was that between organisational insiders (clergy) and outsiders (laity). The main variables recorded were the extent and nature of the lay presence in each committee. The actual composition of first-generation (standing) and second-generation (special) committees at any point in time, including the snapshot presented below (October 2014), is governed by legal provisions established in the two different periods of interest.

As a robustness check, since the following analysis presents evidence from a recent snapshot of committee composition patterns, I also examined membership patterns from several previous years by checking older snapshots of the organisation's website. These older versions are stored at the Internet Archive digital library (accessible online at [archive.org/web](http://archive.org/web)). The digital repository allows users to browse changes to web content, for instance a particular web page, across different points in time. This crosscheck found past membership composition patterns to be identical to those captured by the October 2014 snapshot, a natural consequence of committee membership being subject to the same, unchanged regulations that were introduced in the late 1960s and 1990s respectively. In all, the 2014 snapshot presented in this analysis should be treated as representative of membership patterns over time.

As the church does not ordain female priests, the appointment of external female members to committees was coded as an extreme case of lay membership (cf. Hillman et al. 2007). The appointment of academics, the archetypal experts, was coded as another special case of lay membership. Information on the academic field of lay members was of additional



value, particularly when that field was not theology. This information permitted a more progressive classification of committee members instead of the crude dichotomy of clergy-insiders versus laity-outsiders. Specifically, organisation studies often categorise personnel as insiders, independent outsiders and a middle category of semi outsiders (Baysinger and Butler 1985, 109–113). The latter qualify formally as outsiders, but are closely related to insiders through various links. In the present analysis theology professors served as proxy for the intermediate category of semi outsiders, since academic theology is a confessional (Orthodox) field in Greece.

Tables 2 and 3 describe the composition of first- and second-generation committees respectively as observed in October 2014. These composition patterns sustain important points regarding the involvement – consequential or not – of the laity in high-level church governance. First, the lay presence in both types of committees stands in marked contrast to the pre-1969 period, which excluded the laity altogether. The two periods examined here are similar as high points in the intensity of the conservative ideology and discourse of the clerical leadership. Conservative ideological intensification, therefore, is compatible with tangible internal administrative innovation, contrary to the popular stereotype of this religious actor as a generally sclerotic organisation.

[TABLES 2 & 3 ABOUT HERE]

Second, the lay element is more pronounced in second-generation committees. This is interpreted as a reflection of the different historical context in which these committees were conceived. As already discussed, Greece had become a more liberal and economically advanced country by the time second-generation committees appeared in the

late 1990s. This difference could indicate a more pressing need for the church to obtain specialist knowledge on modern issues: second-generation committees are designed to create lay majorities in most cases (Table 3). This pattern is prescribed explicitly by regulations introduced in the late 1990s. The relatively thinner lay presence in first-generation committees (Table 2), which create clerical majorities in all cases, is prescribed explicitly by the 1969 regulations and preserved in their 1977 revision. Even so, it is worth noting that lay majorities in second-generation committees do not put lay members in control of any committee as external monitors and representatives. According to the regulations the status of senior clergy as committee chairs and selectors of lay members carries special weight (Article 10.2, 590/1977).

Although the number of external female members remains low, these are better represented in Table 3 than in Table 2. Again, this observation should be placed against the backdrop of an organisation lacking any female experts before 1969. A comparison of the fields of expertise of lay academics across first- and second-generation committees is equally informative. The dominance of theologians among lay academic members dissipates in second-generation committees. Considering the most common academic fields in each generation, Figure 1 shows ratio calculations of the number of theologians to the number of non-theologian academics serving as lay members. From the complete absence of external members before 1969 (mixed committees were not present before that year), the organisation moved to the dominance of semi outsiders (approximately a 2:1 ratio after 1969, or two theologians for every non-theologian) and, finally, to the rise of genuine academic outsiders (approximately, a 1:1 ratio after 1998, or one theologian for every non-theologian).

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Third, the stronger lay ‘flavour’ of second-generation committees may not be as radical a development for an additional reason. First-generation committees, which have a stronger clerical presence, deal with issues that lie closer to the organisation’s technical performance core. Questions of doctrine, finance and external relations are more common in the titles of these committees, whereas second-generation committees conduct work mostly on narrower, potentially secondary topics. In all, the ‘hard’ change of interest may not be as far-reaching as the various functional explanations of external involvement anticipate.

#### *An alternative explanation?*

The official depiction of lay involvement as a genuine attempt at improving the operational performance of the church has found mixed evidence; supportive, at least ostensibly, of specialisation and advisory functions, but not of oversight ones. This analytical inadequacy calls for the development of additional explanations of the reform that move beyond performance-related considerations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). I sketch out below an alternative explanation that deals with normative considerations and can be indirectly evaluated with the available information.

The alternative explanation centres on the pivotal and well-documented role of the conservative organisation *Zoë* in Greek society during a large part of the twentieth century. With reference to internal church politics the 1967 election of Hieronymos as leader triggered an influx of *Zoë* members into the church bureaucracy (Yannaras 2000, 107).

Often viewed as a ‘Protestant’ deviation from Orthodox practice, the *Zoë* organisation emphasised individual lay members’ own actions (e.g. missionary activity) in the promotion of religious life and self development (Martin 1978, 248; Yannaras 2000, 154, 314). *Zoë* was also critical of the official church, which it viewed as an ineffective and morally ‘bankrupt’ entity lacking relevance to ‘genuine’ Orthodox Christianity (Yannaras 2000, 45–46; Makrides 2004, 159). Using the Spanish *Opus Dei* case David Martin describes similar movements as vehicles of economic-administrative modernisation and, at the same time, cultural-ideological traditionalism (1978, 131).

This background justifies a view of mixed-member committees, at least the first-generation ones that served as the model for the second generation, as more than a reform attempt to improve organisational performance. The direct influence of *Zoë* on the church hierarchy in the late 1960s anticipates the introduction of these clergy-lay committees for a different reason. By promoting a more visible, albeit not too consequential, role of the laity in internal church matters, the new committee mechanism signalled *Zoë*’s lay-oriented ethos (cf. Anastassiadis 2010, 45, 52). Put somewhat differently, committees were introduced to reflect a normative view of organised religion as part of the entire community of members, especially unordained ones, rather than as the sole responsibility of a clerical hierarchy. Administrative efficiency and effectiveness appear to have been secondary aims, at best, of the reform in question.

## **Discussion and research directions**

The article contributes a comprehensive approach to the study of change in religious institutions. The empirical application of the approach depicts the Orthodox Church of

Greece as capable of ‘hard’, structural innovation. Consider that this church belongs to a theological tradition in which ‘the notions of reformation, revision and renewal are hardly ever defined or emphasized, and are often quietly ignored in favour of staying close to the roots and being faithful to tradition’ (Kalaitzidis 2009, 154). The organisational transformation of interest refers to the appointment of external (lay) representatives to the central governance structure of the church in the second half of the twentieth century. Rather than ‘circling the wagons’, in line with its combative anti-globalisation and anti-modernity discourse under radically conservative leaders, the church strengthened its external linkages by inviting lay members to sit on its committees.

The study points to alternative avenues for the further investigation of the Greek Orthodox case in particular and the comparative study of ecclesiastical organisations in general. Regarding the question of the underlying aims of the reform only access to alternative sources of information, including interviews with senior clergy and committee members, and the use of hitherto inaccessible archival material, such as comprehensive committee minutes, could provide definitive answers. A research design of this type would have to overcome practical barriers related to fieldwork access. It would, however, shed light on several questions that emerge from the present study. For instance, is the reform a tokenistic move by an organisation that merely wants to project an image of conformity to societal norms of representativeness and transparency without applying tangible changes to its day-to-day operations? What are the practical criteria for the appointment of lay members? How do lay members view their role in the organisation? To what extent are committee decisions taken into account by the clerical leadership?

The information that has been analysed here allows only speculation regarding the consequences of the reform. Nevertheless, the organisation's durability implies that the combination of antithetical 'soft' and 'hard' changes may be a valuable strategy for long-term survival. A comparative research design can contrast this particular church's combination of change elements – traditionalist discourse and organisational innovation – with the conduct of religious actors in other settings. Four main change permutations are worth studying. First, as in the Greek case, religious elites may adopt a conservative discourse while promoting organisational innovation. Second, they may adopt a progressive discourse while remaining organisationally conservative. Third and fourth, they may remain consistently conservative or progressive on both counts.

Pertinent questions emerge from this proposed comparative design. Are clerical hierarchies of the second, third and fourth variants as durable as the Greek Orthodox Church (first variant)? Which one of the four strategies is optimal for growth? Do church-state relations, adherence rates and other contextual features play a role in moderating these patterns? Although such alternative lines of inquiry would have to exceed the confines of a single-case study, this presentation was an attempt to examine the two types of change simultaneously, develop an analytical framework that transcended standard discussions of internal secularisation and illustrate the framework's empirical usefulness.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

**Notes on contributor**

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## Appendix: Membership data source

Committee	URL: <a href="http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/">http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/committees/</a> [...]
Chancellery	[...] <a href="#">secretariat/secretariat.htm</a>
Religious art & music	[...] <a href="#">art/art.htm</a>
Worship	[...] <a href="#">worship/worship.htm</a>
Canon & constitutional law	[...] <a href="#">dogma/dogmatics.htm</a>
Monastic life	[...] <a href="#">monastic/monastic.htm</a>
Youth	[...] <a href="#">youth/youth.htm</a>
Interreligious affairs	[...] <a href="#">relations/relations.htm</a>
Ministerial education	[...] <a href="#">education/education.htm</a>
Public relations	[...] <a href="#">press/secretary.htm</a>
Heresies	[...] <a href="#">heresies/heresies.htm</a>
Welfare	[...] <a href="#">welfare/welfare.htm</a>
Finance	[...] <a href="#">economy/economy.htm</a>
EU affairs	[...] <a href="#">europe/europeanaffairs.htm</a>
Bioethics	[...] <a href="#">bioethics/bioethics.htm</a>
Academy of religious art	[...] <a href="#">academy/academy.htm</a>
Human rights	[...] <a href="#">rights/rights.htm</a>
Family and children	[...] <a href="#">family/family.htm</a>
Special pastoral care	[...] <a href="#">pastoral/pastoral.htm</a>
Christian monuments *	[...] <a href="#">monuments/monuments.htm</a>
Environment	[...] <a href="#">environment/environment.htm</a>
Liturgical reform	[...] <a href="#">liturgical/liturgical.htm</a>
Cultural identity	[...] <a href="#">identity/identity.htm</a>
Paganism	[...] <a href="#">ancient/ancient.htm</a>
Women's issues	[...] <a href="#">woman/woman.htm</a>
Immigration *	[...] <a href="#">metanastes/metanastes.htm</a>
Sports	[...] <a href="#">athletics/athletics.htm</a>
Religious tourism	[...] <a href="#">tourism/tourism.htm</a>

Notes: All URLs valid on 27 June 2017



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**Table 1.** Regulations of interest

<b>Archbishop</b>	<b>Regulation</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Committees covered</b>
Hieronimos I (1967-1973)	126	1969	First generation (superseded in 1977)
Seraphim (1974-1998)	590	1977	First generation
Christodoulos (1998-2008)	99 & 101	1998	Selected second generation (EU; Bioethics)
	133-140	1999	Second generation
	160	2004	First and second generation, joint regulations
Hieronimos II (2008-present)	--	--	--

Source: Greek Government Gazette, available from the National Printing Office ([www.et.gr](http://www.et.gr))

**Table 2.** Composition of first-generation committees (2014)

Committee	Clergy	Lay Representatives				Total
		All	[Academic	Theology	Female]	
Chancellery	3	0	0	0	0	3
Religious art & music	5	2	1	0	0	7
Worship	5	2	2	2	0	7
Canon & constitutional law	4	3	3	1	0	7
Monastic life	6	1	1	1	0	7
Youth	7	1	0	0	0	8
Interreligious affairs	5	1	1	1	0	6
Ministerial education	6	1	1	1	0	7
Public relations	4	3	0	0	0	7
Heresies	5	2	1	1	0	7
Welfare	4	3	1	0	1	7
Finance	5	3	0	0	0	8
%	<b>73%</b>	<b>27%</b>				(N=81)

Source: [www.ecclesia.gr](http://www.ecclesia.gr)

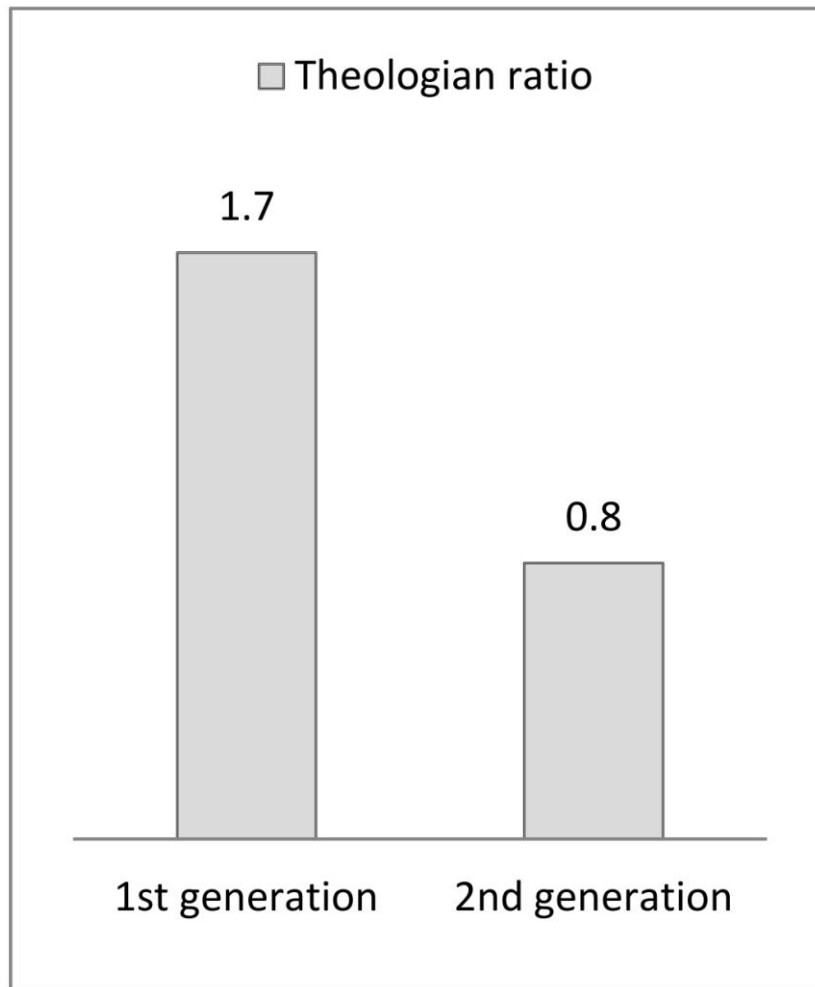
**Table 3.** Composition of second-generation committees (2014)

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Clergy</b>	<b>Lay Representatives</b>				<b>Total</b>
		All	[Academic	Theology	Female]	
EU affairs	5	2	2	0	0	7
Bioethics	2	7	7	2	1	9
Academy of religious art	2	7	2	0	1	9
Human rights	2	7	0	0	0	9
Family and children	3	6	5	3	1	9
Special pastoral care	6	3	2	1	1	9
Christian monuments *	3	6	1	0	1	9
Environment	1	8	7	2	0	9
Liturgical reform	6	3	3	3	0	9
Cultural identity	4	5	0	0	2	9
Paganism	4	8	4	4	0	12
Women's issues	1	6	0	0	6	7
Immigration *	1	8	0	0	5	9
Sports	5	4	0	0	2	9
Religious tourism	3	9	0	0	1	12
%	<b>35%</b>	<b>65%</b>				(N=137)

Source: [www.ecclesia.gr](http://www.ecclesia.gr)

\* Membership details only available for the period 2012-2013





**Figure 1.** Theologians (semi outsiders) versus other lay academics (outsiders) in first- and second-generation committees